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ABSTRACT

Designed to construct a frame of reference and to encourage attitudes that facilitate productive dialogue during and after the conference, this address gives an overview of American mobility, re-examines the problem of managing the education of the migrant/mobile student, explains the structure of the National Policy Workshop on Education for Migrant Secondary Students, and presents a primary challenge of American education. After a comparison between the impact of mobile families upon the real estate industry and the impact of student transfers on local school systems, the paper discusses the unrealistic expectations concerning the parent role in student transfers, the limitations which lack of information puts on the school's ability to provide services, the disruptive impact on instructional continuity caused by the mobility factor, the need for a computerized communications network to give each school system access to information on transfer and migrant students, and the importance of the Migrant Student Record Transfer System. The major areas to be covered by the workshops and the role of panel moderators are described. The address concludes by presenting the construction of a modern electronic system to provide educational continuity for mobile students as the primary challenge of American education. (CM)

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CONFERENCE IN DIALOGUE

PRESENTATION BY

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

AT

THE NATIONAL POLICY WORKSHOP ON

EDUCATION FOR MIGRANT SECONDARY STUDENTS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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The honor of making these opening remarks really belongs to Congressman William D. Ford for his skillful handling of migrant education legislation. The honor also belongs to Vidal Rivera, Jr., whose charisma has given cohesion to the early developments in migrant education. It belongs to Joe Miller, whose clear vision of the purpose and role of the Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS) has advanced the development of the computer system to meet the new challenges in migrant education. It belongs to Raul de la Rosa, whose tenacity has expanded the imagination of migrant education. It belongs to Jesse Vela, whose local leadership demonstrates the vitality and flexibility required to make migrant education an intra-state and interstate program. And the honor also belongs to Robert Youngblood, president of the National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education, who will continue the construction of the migrant education system in the new conservative environment.

Because the honor belongs to these exemplary leaders, the National Education Association feels especially privileged to have the opportunity to address this conference. I believe that this conference and its outcomes will be the next critical phase in constructing the migrant/mobile education system. The National Policy Workshop on Education for Migrant Secondary Students will become a part of other critical actions in migrant education. Those actions include:

1. The meeting in the 1960's of the several ESEA - Title I State Directors who--using the provisions granted by Section 505 of ESEA - Title V -- advocated and charted the course for migrant education.
2. The Educational Amendments of 1966, P.L. 89-750, Section 103 of ESEA - Title I, which established the speical mechanism to provide for the needs of migrant agricultural workers.

3. The establishment of the Committee on the Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS), which served until 1975 as an ex-officio policy-making body for migrant education. Thereafter, policy-making was formalized under the National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education.
4. The Education Amendments of 1978, P.L. 95-561, which sanctioned the MSRTS as an interstate communication system for transmitting migrant students' records and information and established the data base for funding. In addition, Section 143 of 95-561 requires interstate cooperation and coordination in program development and operation.
5. The development and implementation of the Skills Information System (math, reading, oral-language and early childhood development), unifying the educational experiences of pre-school and elementary students as they travel from school to school.
6. The establishment of the Office of Migrant Education by Section 303(a) of the Department of Education Organization Act, 1980. Section 303(a) also transferred the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) and the College Migrant Assistance Program (CAMP) to the Office of Migrant Education, thus establishing a single office to administer and coordinate a comprehensive educational delivery system for migrant students providing them access to quality education at every level.

For this conference to achieve the success of previous actions in migrant education we must be prepared to talk, listen, search, and understand the importance of our role, whether as citizen, state or nation, so that together we might resolve to educate every child regardless of the duration of his or her attendance in our schools. Thus, the code words for this historic conference are dialogue, communication, and resolution.

My specific assignment is to help construct a frame of reference and encourage attitudes that facilitate open, meaningful, and productive dialogue during and after this conference. I will attempt to accomplish my task by first taking a general look at American mobility. Second, I will reexamine the problem of managing the education of the migrant/mobile student. Third, I will explain the structure of the National Policy Workshop on Education for Migrant Secondary Students. Finally, I will come full circle by presenting the primary challenge not only of this conference but of American education.

AMERICAN MOBILITY

American structures have neglected the mobility factor in planning and designing policies and programs. The impact of this oversight can be underscored by comparing two of many efforts to cope with American mobility by citizens, professional groups, organizations, agencies, and industry. Until recently, the real estate industry, like education has operated under the principle of local autonomy. House hunting with a real estate agent was and still is a common practice for families moving to a new area of residence. House hunting takes place in a pressurized environment. Frequently, the transaction occurs in a short time span. The transaction is complicated when the information exchanged between the client and the agent is incomplete or disorganized; this limits the agent's ability to provide the best professional service to the client. Consequently, the real estate agent is not always able to match the individual needs and resources of the client with the available properties on the market.

An article on real estate estimated that thirty (30) million families change residence every year in this country. Families move from coast to coast, within states, and between states. So volume and distance, as well as short

time span, put pressure on real estate transactions in mobile America. Two recent developments--the establishment of national firms such as Century 21, and computer networking--are the results of the real estate industry trying to manage the mobility factor in its relocation services.

It is estimated that those thirty (30) million families that move every year include nine (9) million school-age children. The impact of student transfers on local school systems is comparable to the pressure being felt by the real estate industry. Classroom teachers have articulated their concerns about student transfers. The teaching profession, meeting in convention last year, adopted the following resolution on student transfers:

> "The National Education Association believes that the current mobility of the American society dictates the need to expedite information exchanges between schools when students transfer.
>
> The Association encourages its local and state affiliates and all boards of education to pursue steps to achieve an effective transfer process." (B-46, 80)

PROBLEM AND BEGINNING

What are the requirements, what is needed to implement the NEA resolution on student transfers? Before trying to answer the question I want to present an unrealistic expectation in student transfers.

It is unreasonable to assume that parents with school-age children adhere to the following procedures when they move: 1. Before withdrawing their children from the present (sending) school, parents talk with teacher, counselor, principal, or superintendent about their children's educational needs and resources. 2. Parents obtain from the present (sending) school a copy of each child's record. 3. Parents obtain other pertinent informa-

tion about the sending school and its educational programs and services used by their children. 4. When registering their children at the new (receiving) school, parents deliver the information and records provided by the sending school. 5. Parents meet with the appropriate personnel in the new (receiving) school to discuss their children's educational needs and resources. The discussion will result in their children receiving educational programs and services identical or very similar to those experienced in the sending school.

Since the above procedure would appear to be in the best interest of the children, it might be expected that the parents and the school would carefully comply with the procedure. However, parents already under the pressure and excitment of moving are more likely to wait until they register their children before contacting either the sending or receiving school. As in the real estate instance, the information exchanged between the parents (clients) and the school (agent) is apt to be incomplete and disorganized. The lack of information limits the school's ability to provide the best professional service to the clients. Consequently, the school is not always able to match the individual needs and resources of the incoming students (clients) with the available programs and services.

The information exchange required in transfering students becomes more complicated with each additional move. In other words, the mobility factor increases proportionally to the number and frequency of moves. Thus, the greater the mobility factor, the greater its disruptive impact on intructional continuity, which is critical to the education of each student.

As a minimum, realization of the NEA resolution on student transfers would require that every school system train all personnel to operate a systemwide program on credit requirements, instructional continuity and treatment, instructional coordination and counseling, and credit accrual and exchange. Meeting the minimum requirements, however, would not in and of itself be very effective in managing the mobility factor in student transfers. The critical link in bringing the mobility factor under control is a computerized communications network to which each school system in the nation must have access for transmitting and receiving information on migrant, mobile, and transfer students.

Constructing a communications network for managing the mobility factor will of course involve large amounts of time, resources, detail, and coordination. It will certainly mean that our institutions of higher learning will need to revamp their programs to train present and new school personnel to use modern technology in the classroom and the school. Fortunately, because of migrant education, American education is not without experience in dealing with mobility. What is needed, however, is for the rest of American education to become aware of that experience and become involved in developing our abilities and increasing our capability in managing the mobility factor.

The migrant education experience, particularly the Migrant Student Record Transfer System, is one of the cornerstones in building a system and capability for serving migrant, mobile, and transfer students. The significance of this conference is that dialogue between the various facets of American education must take place in order to complete the planning for and

the construction of a communications network for all of education.

CONFERENCE IN DIALOGUE

Very deliberate effort has been made to structure the National Policy Workshop on Education for Migrant Secondary Students in a format that will increase the dialogue between participants on the critical issues of migrant/mobile education.

The dialogue in the workshops will center on the following major areas of functions and responsibilities:

1. Credit Requirement List
2. Instructional Continuity and Treatment (Setting and Materials)
3. Credit Accrual and Exchange
4. Instructional Coordination and Counseling
5. Communication Sequence and Roles (MSRTS)

The in-depth workshop dialogue on functions and responsibilities is critical to improving education for migrant high school students. However, the subsequent panel dialogue will help weave the critical functions and responsibilities into cohesive design.

The role of the moderator, particularly in the panel dialogue, is crucial to managing the dialogue so that the attention of the conference is always focused on the issue being considered at any given moment. The request we make of others is never realistic or achievable, that is why we are only asking the moderators to be fast and accurate in their analysis, to be firm yet display a good sense of humor, and above all to demonstrate, at all times, good judgement.

Perhaps the most impossible task of the moderator will be to manage the migrant education "war stories," making sure that these anecdotes contribute to understanding rather than confusing the major function or responsibility being discussed at a particular moment.

Senator Jack Perry, the moderator for the panel dialogue, will have the most difficult task. The Senator will be responsible for helping the audience become an integral part of the panel dialogue. He must carry out what could be a very unpopular assignment of accepting or denying comments or questions from the audience. This assignment requires great judgment, because the prerequisite for acceptance or denial will be the relevancy of the comment or question to the panelists' specific point at a particular moment in the dialogue. The audience, therefore, has the obligation to follow the dialogue attentively so that their comments are relevant to the point. The audience is also responsible for thinking through comments and questions in order to state them clearly and succinctly.

There is obvious confidence that Senator Perry's skill and diplomacy will make this very unique and complicated panel dialogue a major highlight of the conference.

CONTINUING CHALLENGE

The primary challenge to American Education now is to construct a modern electronic system within the traditional system so that migrant, mobile, and transfer students can enter and exit schools without disrupting the continuity critical to their education. All conference dialogue must be related to that challenge. We need for example to stop thinking provin-

cially about such language as provided in Section 141 (a) of ESEA Title I. Rather, when we read, for example, "(including the acquisition of equipment and where necessary the construction of school facilities)," we must talk about using modern technology to equip traditional school buildings with electronic computer facilities necessary for handling the problems inherent in mobility.

The 1.7 million members of the National Education Association, who are directly impacted by the mobility factor, ask that we work together in bringing to full realization the concept of expediting information exchange between schools. Finally, I urge all of us to maintain the dialogue started in this conference until we have met the challenge.